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A Survey of Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers on Training and Knowledge of State Anti-Bullying Laws and Policies Related to Students With Disabilities

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Educational Foundations and Special Education
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Education in Special Education with a concentration in
Advanced Studies in Special Education

by
Molly Henry
December 2020

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Dr. Lori Marks
Dr. Pamela Mims
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Keywords: bullying, peer victimization, students with disabilities, teacher training, anti-bullying laws

ABSTRACT

A Survey of Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers on Training and Knowledge of State Anti-Bullying Laws and Policies Related to Students With Disabilities

by

Molly Henry

Bullying is a serious problem on its own but emerging research suggests that bullying may present differently in students with disabilities and affect them more severely than previously thought. The purpose of this study was to explore the multi-layered issue of bullying involving students with disabilities, examine the programs and legislation developed around this issue, and determine the training and knowledge teachers and teacher candidates have regarding the problem. An exploratory survey was completed by 105 teachers and teacher candidates in northeast Tennessee. Descriptive statistics and T-tests revealed that in-service teachers were more knowledgeable in identification of bullying and the components of Tennessee's anti-bullying law than pre-service teachers. Additionally, this study found that elementary teachers answered more general bullying knowledge questions correctly than upper grade teachers. The limited utilization of evidence-based bullying prevention and intervention programs and strategies was also noted. Implications for teacher training programs will be discussed.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Lauren and Jay Henry, for encouraging me and being by my side at a moment's notice despite being 1,000 miles away. Successful completion of this thesis in under six months during a global pandemic would not have been possible without their support and motivation every step of the way. Thank you for believing in me! I would also like to dedicate this thesis to any student who has experienced the trauma of bullying; you are the reason I am so passionate about this topic and thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Problem

For a long time, bullying has been one of the most pervasive problems in American schools, and despite many school and societal efforts to curtail it, the problem continues (Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, 2020). In a 2000 study by Cantu and Heumann, the authors referred to bullying as “the most predominant problem faced by children in the United States’ education system,” and this assertion continued to be repeated by later researchers (Cantu & Heumann, 2000; Raskauskas & Modell, 2011). In 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics stated that 25% of elementary and high school students reported being victimized weekly, and this statistic was 40% for middle school students, giving an overall percentage of approximately 28% of U.S. students experiencing bullying victimization (Flynt & Morton, 2008). In 2005, results of a survey indicated that bullying involved or impacted about 70% of students in U.S. schools in some capacity (Canter, 2005). By 2010, experts stated that “bullying has risen to heights that demand national attention” (Schoen & Schoen, 2010, p.68). Despite all this attention, however, the statistics regarding bullying prevalence remain largely unchanged, with recent reports indicating that about 20% of students between the ages of 12-18 in the United States still experience bullying in their schools today (Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, 2020).

Considering bullying is the result of multiple individual, cultural, and social-ecological factors and because the term can describe both overt and covert actions, it is one of the most complex social interactions to study and research (Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012). There is, nonetheless, a clear consensus on how bullying is defined. The most commonly cited definition of bullying across educational research comes from the Swedish-Norwegian psychologist, Dr.

Dan Olweus, one of the first researchers to study bullying in depth (Ortiz-Bush & Lee, 2018). Olweus's definition of bullying (which he first advanced in 1993 and continued to develop and revise in later publications), identifies it as "aggressive behavior or intentional harm doing" which is "carried out repeatedly and over time" and occurs within a relationship "characterized by an actual or perceived imbalance of power or strength" (Olweus, 2010). This explanation remains the enduring definition of bullying to this day, referenced in almost every research study on the topic (Campbell et al., 2017; Flynt & Morton, 2008; Hartley et al., 2015; O'Brennan et al., 2014; Ofe et al., 2016; Ortiz-Bush & Lee, 2018; Schoen & Schoen, 2010; Swearer et al., 2012; Wells et al., 2018). Others have edited or expanded on this definition over the years, but Olweus's basic criteria of intent to do harm, repetition, and imbalance of power remain the essential core elements of an act of bullying and are the characteristics that separate bullying from other unwanted or negative social behaviors to this day.

Bullying involving students with disabilities is an even more complex school and social issue than school-based bullying in general (Hartley et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2011; Swearer et al., 2012). Bullying affects students with special needs in higher percentages than are seen overall and often impacts these students even more severely than their general education peers (Hartley et al. 2015; Rose et al., 2011). Students with disabilities do not adhere to the same patterns of bullying involvement as general education students do (Hartley et al., 2015; Swearer et al., 2012). Additionally, the nature and severity of their disability type can have drastic effects on the amount and type of bullying involvement they experience, and in some cases they have more limited access to the anti-bullying programs in place at their schools and in their communities (Adams et al., 2016; Bear et al., 2015; Kurth et al., 2017; Swearer et al., 2012). For all these reasons, it is crucial for researchers to examine the complex issue of bullying and special

education, and for all educators to be trained and knowledgeable in bullying facts as well as in the laws, strategies, programs, and policies their states and schools have implemented and developed to combat this insidious problem.

One reason why thorough teacher training in anti-bullying laws and policies is necessary is that bullying is notoriously challenging to identify and therefore to intervene in (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Flynt & Morton, 2008). Bullying most often occurs in subtle ways when students are out of sight and earshot of teachers, and this is especially true in the case of cyberbullying, which has increased in recent years and is even harder than other forms of bullying for teachers to detect, as it often does not happen on school grounds or during school hours (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Additionally, victimized students and bystanders rarely feel comfortable reporting bullying to teachers or parents, fearing retaliation or punishment (Bradshaw et al., 2013). In fact, despite 87% of teachers reporting that they had effective strategies for handling a bullying situation, and 97% reporting that they would intervene when they witness bullying, observational and survey research found that teachers intervene in only 15-18% of bullying incidents, and that only 21% of victimized students will report the events to a staff member (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Craig et al., 2000).

The other major factor allowing bullying to continue and rise in our schools is inadequate intervention when bullying is witnessed (Bradshaw et al., 2013). The problems with identification and intervention go hand in hand. When bullying is not identified or recognized as the critical problem that it is, then it is almost impossible to intervene effectively. In fact, bullying in American schools is so underreported that many teachers and administrators often lack awareness of how much bullying actually takes place in their schools, and when they do witness bullying, many teachers do not feel prepared to intervene, as they do not have the

resources or training in how to do so most effectively (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Flynt & Morton, 2008). Without comprehensive anti-bullying training providing knowledge of state laws and school and district policies, teachers will continue to struggle to identify and intervene in bullying situations, allowing the problem to go unchecked and students (particularly those with disabilities) to remain at risk of victimization.

Prevention Efforts at Various Levels

Bullying Prevention/Protection at the National Level

When considering special education laws, we may think about the academic protections and guarantees to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and the necessary services provided by federal laws like IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004), ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990), or RA (Rehabilitation Act, 1973), but we must also ask how these laws and policies can be used to protect the social-emotional well-being of our most at-risk students. This is the question addressed by Dr. Kathleen Conn in an article in *West's Education Law Reporter* published in 2009 (Conn, 2009).

In Conn's commentary, she reviews key court decisions involving bullying or harassment of special education students pleading IDEA violations and addresses the dark history of harassment protections for special education students (Conn, 2009). Conn's purpose in this piece is to investigate whether IDEA is a viable way to ensure social-emotional well-being and safety as well as academic equality for students with special needs (Conn, 2009). Her commentary indicates that although IDEA can provide a promising approach to protecting the educational rights of students with disabilities who have been victimized, there are nonetheless shortcomings and obstacles present in the early court decisions and in the federal guidelines of today that make it difficult for families to find justice when the rights of a student with disabilities are violated

due to acts of bullying (Conn, 2009). Additionally, Conn's discussion of IDEA claims and court decisions makes it clear that parents are only able to seek justice and protection under the law after an act of bullying has occurred and the damage to the student's education has already happened (Conn, 2009). At present, there is no federal law that would prevent such victimization from occurring (ASPA, 2020).

Bullying Prevention/ Protection at the State Level

While legislation at the federal level does not directly address bullying prevention, laws at the state level have begun to move in that direction over the past two decades (Nikolaou, 2017). The defining moment for the nation to begin noticing and taking legal action against bullying came after the 1999 Columbine High School shooting (Nikolaou, 2017). As a result of this tragedy, Georgia and New Hampshire became the first two states to pass anti-bullying legislation, in 1999 and 2000, respectively (Nikolaou, 2017). By 2005, 23 states had established anti-bullying laws, and by August 31st, 2010, 43 states had statutes or regulations specifically addressing bullying in schools (Keuny & Zirkel, 2012; Nikolaou, 2017). That left seven states (Alabama, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, and North and South Dakota) without any anti-bullying laws, and Montana with only a policy statement regarding bullying, but still no legislation at that point in time (Keuny & Zirkel, 2012; Nikolaou, 2017). It wasn't until April of 2015 that all 50 states and territories had enacted anti-bullying laws, with Montana being the last state to do so (Nikolaou, 2017).

Keuny and Zirkel systematically analyzed each state's anti-bullying laws on a five-part coding scheme across the six key components of anti-bullying legislation: Definition, Policy, Notice, Reporting, Investigation, and Consequences (Keuny & Zirkel, 2012). Given the population that will comprise the survey portion of the principal investigator's study, it is

important to consider Tennessee's anti-bullying law (first enacted in 2005) and how it scored in this analysis. Overall, Tennessee's policy scored relatively high, as it contains all components set forth by Keuny and Zirkel, and it requires three or four of them. Tennessee's anti-bullying law loses the distinction of being classified as a gold star policy, however, as it does not contain a clear definition of bullying, only requires notification to one of the identified critical groups, does not require or provide immunity or sanctions to those who report (although it encourages these), and does not provide remedial or mental health services for the victim (Keuny & Zirkel, 2012). Like the majority of states in this analysis (24), Tennessee does not define bullying as a distinct behavior, but provides instead a vague definition of a collection of aggressive acts, and does not reference any of the three criteria from Olweus' widely accepted definition (intent to harm, repetition, and imbalance of power) (Keuny & Zirkel, 2012; Olweus, 1993; Olweus, 2010).

Bullying Prevention/Protection at the School or District Level

Having scrutinized the bullying protections available at the national and state level (and their shortcomings) it is important to also consider school and district level anti-bullying programs and policies. There are, in fact, numerous stand-alone programs in place and being developed that schools often rush to purchase and implement to reduce the problem of bullying that has been identified in their school, district, or community (Good et al., 2011). One of these programs that is specific to Tennessee is STARS (Students Taking a Right Stand) which is an umbrella project for multiple stand-alone anti-bullying programs such as Kids on the Block, Move2Stand, and the Student Assistance Program (STARS Nashville, 2020). STARS also has a disability-specific anti-bullying program called Services for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) (STARS Nashville, 2020). These kinds of stand-alone programs sponsored by

STARS are just a few in a long list of programs used at schools throughout the country. Other anti-bullying curricula include *Expect Respect*, *CAPSLE (Creating a Peaceful School Learning Environment)*, *the 5 Ws*, *Steps to Respect*, *WITS*, *Project ACHIEVE*, and *Take a Stand, Lend a Hand* (Goodman et al., 2013; Polanin et al., 2012).

Stand-alone programs often include school assemblies with speakers educating students on how bullying hurts themselves and others, encouraging bystanders to take action by reporting bullying situations, and alerting teachers to the need to increase their surveillance in order to identify and either harshly punish or educate the perpetrators (Good et al., 2011). These kinds of programs and strategies, however, have been shown by some researchers to have the opposite of their intended effects, often actually increasing the amount of bullying present in a school community (Good et al., 2011). Good and colleagues suggest three main reasons why these types of stand-alone programs always seem to fail regardless of how well developed they seem. These programs do not work, they assert, because they inadvertently give the bullies all the attention they are craving, are reactive rather than preventive, and are not sustainable without significant buy-in from teachers (Good et al. 2011).

Purpose and Research Questions

Purpose

Bullying, and specifically bullying involving students with disabilities, is a crucial problem that needs to be addressed in our school communities. Doing so requires teacher knowledge and understanding of state anti-bullying laws and school or district anti-bullying policies, as well as enhanced identification and intervention skills which need to be provided through training and professional development programs. While there is evidence of positive change in anti-bullying efforts to protect students with disabilities at the national and state levels,

as well as more attention in educational research being paid to the role disability status plays in bullying, true progress can only be made if teachers are being trained to know their state and school policies and to competently and consistently identify and intervene in bullying situations (Bear et al., 2015; Conn, 2009; Good et al., 2011; Hartley et al., 2015; Swearer et al., 2012).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine if pre-service and in-service teachers located in the rural southeast region of the United States were provided adequate preparation and training to accurately answer knowledge based questions about bullying and their state and school anti-bullying law and policy, as well as to identify and address bullying situations involving students with disabilities.

Research Questions

1. Do teachers currently receive training in a bullying policy or program?
2. If teachers do receive such training, does it address the needs of students with disabilities?
3. Are pre-service and in-service teachers knowledgeable about their state's anti-bullying laws and procedures?
4. Can pre-service and in-service teachers correctly identify bullying situations involving students with disabilities?
5. Are advances in teacher preparation programs in the area of bullying reflected in the survey responses? Do pre-service teachers have a better knowledge than in-service teachers of bullying laws and facts related to students with disabilities

Significance

The findings of this study will prove valuable to future researchers interested in addressing the training and knowledge of current and prospective teachers in their region

regarding bullying identification, intervention skills, laws, and policies. In addition, this study will be useful to those interested in developing or evaluating the effectiveness of various anti-bullying teacher training curricula and/or school based anti-bullying programs. In this manner, it will help to combat the problem of bullying of students with disabilities by making teachers more aware of the problem and better prepared to address it.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Dynamics of Bullying

In order to combat the problem of bullying in our education system, we need to better understand the intricacies of the bullying dynamic in general, as well as address how patterns of bullying are different in their presentation within, and their effects on students in various disability groups. Bullying is a complex social problem relying on hierarchical structures and relationships, but through years of research, it has been revealed that there are very specific roles and patterns within the bullying dynamic (Hartley et al., 2015; Ofe et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2011; Swearer et al., 2012). Identification of these roles and patterns is crucial to intervention and ultimately may help to prevent the detrimental longitudinal effects of bullying on children, the adults they grow into, and the communities in which they live.

Students are involved in bullying in one of four ways. They may be bullies, victims, bully-victims, or bystanders (Ofe et al., 2016; Swearer et al., 2012). There are common characteristics of students most likely to fulfill each of these roles within the bullying dynamic. Bullies are students who intentionally cause emotional or physical harm to another individual. Bullies tend to have some sort of physical or social power over their victims, they act impulsively and often aggressively, and they show a lack of empathy towards their victims (Ofe et al., 2016). The reactivity and emotionally detached personalities of bullies can lead them towards engaging in illegal and abusive behaviors in adolescence and adulthood (Carran & Kellner, 2009; Ofe et al., 2016). In contrast, victims are typically characterized by being physically different or weaker than their peers, by having an anxious or insecure personality, and by being socially isolated (Ofe et al., 2016). The experience of being victimized, especially when the bullying is frequent or chronic, leads victims to experience a multitude of

psychological and academic difficulties throughout life, including depression, anxiety, further isolation from peers, fear or avoidance of school, and decreased ability to concentrate, which in turn, leads to lower academic performance (Carran & Kellner, 2009; Good et al., 2011; Ofe et al., 2016). Bully-victims are individuals who are victimized but who also bully others, often to displace their feelings of anger and aggression and to regain some social power (Ofe et al., 2016). This group is at the greatest risk for poor psychological functioning as they experience both the detrimental internalizing and externalizing outcomes experienced by both victims and perpetrators of bullying (Ofe et al., 2016). Emerging research suggests that cyberbullying may be a preferred method of perpetration for this group, as individuals can hide their identity (avoiding any additional in-person victimization as a result) (Ofe et al., 2016). Bystanders make up the largest proportion of student involvement in bullying at 60%; these are the individuals who witness bullying but do nothing to stop it, and often their silence allows the bullying cycle to continue (Ofe et al., 2016).

Longitudinal Effects of Bullying

Research into the academic and social outcomes of students who have been involved in bullying reveals the social-emotional and educational consequences to these students, as well as the fact that these consequences are even more apparent in students with disabilities (Adams et al., 2016; O'Brennan et al., 2015). In 2015, O'Brennan and colleagues followed 7,314 students in K-2 classrooms for four school years and measured changes in their concentration and emotional regulation, looking at special education status and peer victimization roles for their impact on academic and social-emotional functioning both in the short and long term (O'Brennan et al., 2015). Their results showed that students who were involved in bullying in any context demonstrated higher concentration problems at baseline and indicated that for all

7,314 students, concentration problems increased over the four years (O'Brennan et al., 2015). O'Brennan et al. (2015) also found that students in special education exhibited more concentration problems at baseline than general education students regardless of bullying involvement. However, students in special education who acted as bullies had slightly fewer concentration problems than victimized students in special education, and students in special education who acted as bullies actually decreased their concentration problems over the four years, making up the attentional deficit between themselves and general education students by the end of the study, whereas victimized students continued to increase their concentration problems (O'Brennan et al., 2015).

On the issue of emotional regulation, O'Brennan and colleagues noted that students in special education began with lower levels of emotional regulation on average compared to their general education peers, with students in special education who were victimized scoring lower in this category than any group at baseline (O'Brennan et al., 2015). Despite slight increases in emotional regulation for students who frequently bullied others, the growth trajectory for emotional regulation remained relatively flat for all four years for all groups (O'Brennan et al., 2015). What this data suggested overall, therefore, was that the emotional regulation ability of students with special needs and those who are involved in bullying, which is low to begin with for these populations, remained lower than that of their uninvolved general education peers through the end of the study (O'Brennan et al., 2015).

In 2016, Adams and colleagues examined the detrimental effects of the bullying experience on students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in inclusive classrooms (Adams et al., 2016). These researchers combined and compared data from two studies of bullying involving students with ASD (Adams et al., 2014; Zablotzky et al., 2014) and were able to make

strong assertions about the bullying experience (focusing on common victimization types and effects) for this student group, finding that all victimization, but particularly verbal and relational forms, significantly correlated with educational difficulty in otherwise cognitively able students with ASD (Adams et al., 2016). In both studies, the researchers found that verbal victimization was linked to feeling unsafe or afraid to go to school (Adams et al., 2016). Of particular interest was the finding that a specific form of bullying that targeted or provoked the student with ASD to engage in self-stimulating or aggressive behaviors was both highly prevalent (with 63.5% of students in the first study having experienced this) and the most detrimental to both social-emotional and academic outcomes (Adams et al., 2016).

The Special Problem of Special Education and Bullying

Bullying in General Education as Compared to Bullying in Special Education

Not only are there long-term consequences for students with disabilities who have been involved in bullying, but researchers also note that students with disabilities are overrepresented in the bullying dynamic as a whole (Rose et al., 2011). Emerging research clearly shows that the rates and patterns of bullying and victimization for students in special education are different from those seen in the general education population (Hartley et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2011; Swearer et al., 2012). In one survey of special educators regarding observed bullying incidents of their students, 96.7% reported that they had observed multiple types of bullying incidents occurring to their students within the past two years (Holzbauer, 2008). In 2011, Rose and colleagues reported findings in two different studies showing that students with disabilities are twice as likely as their general education peers to be involved in both bullying and victimization (Rose et al., 2011). Their second study, which specifically separated the bullying dynamic into three categories (victimization, bullying (verbal/relational), and physical fighting) elicited an

interesting finding that students with disabilities self-reported significantly more victimization and slightly more fighting behaviors than students without disabilities, but did not differ from their peers in rates of bullying perpetration (Rose et al., 2011).

The finding of Rose and colleagues that students with disabilities engage in fighting more than in other forms of bullying perpetration when compared to students without disabilities correlates with other studies which suggest that bullying is a different experience for students with disabilities than for their general education peers (Rose et al., 2011). For example, there is a typical progression and pattern seen in the evolution of bullying in general education students in early childhood, elementary school, and middle school. What is typically seen in general education students is a higher proportion of physical bullying occurring early on, which then evolves into verbal and relational bullying becoming most prevalent in upper elementary and beyond, as students gain more complex verbal skills (Hartley et al., 2015). Typically, there are also slight gender differences in bullying, with more boys involved in physical bullying and more girls involved in relational bullying (Hartley et al., 2015, Swearer et al., 2012). Additionally, bullying prevalence rates in general education students typically increase year by year until peaking in seventh grade, and then decrease through the high school years (Swearer et al., 2012).

Bullying involving students with disabilities, however, does not follow any of these typical patterns which can be categorized by type, age, or gender. Instead, students with disabilities in many cases do not seem to outgrow victimization and often continue to be involved in physical bullying and fighting well past adolescence, perhaps because for many students with disabilities, communication skills remain undeveloped well into adolescence and adulthood (Hartley et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2011). In 2011, Rose and colleagues indicated that

victimization is the primary concern for students with disabilities and suggests that this group's incidents of bullying perpetration may actually be retaliation responses to being victimized rather than unprovoked instances of bullying (Rose et al., 2011).

Rose and colleagues' hypothesis that the bullying behavior of students with disabilities is more often retaliatory than unprovoked is supported by other studies that show that the largest bullying group for students with disabilities is the bully-victim category, accounting for approximately half of students with observable or behavioral disabilities (47.2 % and 51.2 % respectively), compared to 30% of students with non-observable or no disabilities (Swearer et al., 2012). In 2012, Swearer and colleagues reported that 64.7-79% of students with disabilities in their study experienced victimization (victim-only or bully-victim) compared to 65.6% of students without disabilities, while the bully-only category ranged from 2.3-9.8% for each disability group (average of 5.9%) compared to 6.6% of students with no disabilities (Swearer et al., 2012). In 2015, Bear and colleagues looked even more specifically at the prevalence of victimization by bullying type and disability type and grouped their results into 10 disability categories for each form of bullying (verbal, relational, and physical). They found in this study that for all three forms of bullying, students with disabilities were on average 31-45% more likely to be victimized (Bear et al., 2015).

Even in a study in which all participants reported being frequent victims of bullying, students with disabilities stood out from their peers. In 2015, Hartley and colleagues found that students with disabilities reported being victimized significantly more frequently than students without disabilities, and that they experienced more psychological distress from victimization than their general education peers (Hartley et al., 2015). In this study, it was found that students with disabilities were twice as likely to report daily physical and emotional harm compared to

students without disabilities (22.6 and 44% of students with disabilities compared to 11.4 and 22.6% of students without disabilities) and they reported severe distress to the point of feeling unsafe and threatened at school at more than three times the rate of that of students without disabilities (17.5% and 5.3% respectively). For both victimized groups, verbal bullying was most frequently reported, with approximately 63% stating they had experienced this form, followed by approximately 43% reporting relational bullying in both groups. Although physical bullying was the least prevalent form of bullying reported by both general and special education students, students with disabilities still reported significantly more physical bullying than their general education peers, and boys in special education reported experiencing more physical bullying than any other group (Hartley et al., 2015). Students with disabilities were also significantly more likely to report being bullied by adults than students in general education (Hartley et al., 2015).

Bullying Within Specific Disability Groups

Even with these differences between general and special education students as student categories, the special education group is still very diverse, and the intricacies of the many various disabilities included under special education can have profound effects on the amounts and types of bullying that students with disabilities may experience. In order to better identify and intervene in bullying situations involving students with disabilities, it is important that we not just rely on assumptions such as the idea that all students with disabilities are more likely to be bullied or that they are all likely to be bullied in the same ways. These assumptions are problematic because while it is true that many disabilities expose students to more bullying, other students are potentially protected from victimization because of their disability (Bear et al., 2015). Researchers have examined the prevalence of bullying and victimization within and across specific disability groups to begin to understand both the risk and protective factors

regarding bullying of students with various diagnoses (Bear et al., 2015; Swearer et al., 2012; Wells et al., 2019).

Some researchers have begun the process of exploring the topic of disability specific bullying by combining a few disabilities into categories based on related characteristics among those disabilities. For example, Swearer and colleagues created three categories of disabilities based on the visibility of symptoms. They combined speech/language impairment, hearing impairment, and intellectual disabilities into one category they designated as observable disabilities, while categorizing specific learning disabilities as non-observable disabilities, and EBD and other health impairments as behavioral disabilities (Swearer et al., 2012). Using a survey (Pacific Rim Bullying Measure), they compared the participants' reports of bullying and victimization by disability type and status, looking for patterns of bully, victim, or bully-victim status, and tried to determine how these patterns were related to prosocial behavior (Swearer et al., 2012). Their results supported their hypothesis that the visibility of the disability increased the likelihood that a student would be involved in bullying, with approximately 80% of students with either behavioral or observable disabilities reporting being victimized, compared to approximately 65% of students with non-observable or nonexistent disabilities reporting victimization (Swearer et al., 2012).

Attempting to understand why students with behavioral and observable disabilities are victimized at much higher rates than students with non-observable disabilities, Swearer and colleagues examined measures of prosocial behavior in students with behavioral or observable disabilities as a potential protective factor against involvement in bullying (Swearer et al., 2012). They found that although there was a significantly negatively correlated pattern between prosocial behavior and bullying and although students in special education engaged in less

prosocial behaviors, the effect size of prosocial behavior was not large enough to be considered a protective factor for students with disabilities (Swearer et al., 2012).

In 2019, Wells and colleagues took a similar approach to Swearer et al. (2012) as they compared small groups of related disabilities, attempting to determine risk and protective factors for students with various disabilities. Their groupings included physical disabilities, PTSD, ADHD, depression, and learning disabilities (Wells et al., 2019). Wells and colleagues focused on determining the medium of bullying most common for students with each disability (i.e., in-person or cyberbullying) (Wells et al., 2019). They found that 31% of students with a physical disability reported experiencing cyberbullying only, that 27% of students with learning disabilities reported being bullied in person only, and that 35% of students with depression reported experiencing both forms of harassment (Wells et al., 2019). Another interesting finding was that students who reported that they had a disability requiring an IEP were less likely to experience harassment at school, perhaps because of the presence of an adult support at school reducing the opportunities for harassment (Wells et al., 2019).

Noting that the significant differences between general and special education students held true even as researchers extrapolated smaller groupings of related disabilities, Bear and colleagues attempted to further specify the findings of prior researchers by choosing to look at each disability individually, comparing students with 10 individual special education diagnoses to each other as well as to students without disabilities on the frequency of victimization from all three types of bullying (verbal, relational, and physical) (Bear et al., 2015). The amount of victimization experienced ranged from 0%-90% of parents of children with various disabilities reporting that their child had been a victim of bullying (Bear et al., 2015). Students with orthopedic impairment were the most protected from bullying in this study, followed by students

with moderate intellectual disabilities (Bear et al., 2015). These two groups experienced less victimization than the average general education student.

Bear and colleagues found that all other disability groups in the study were victimized at higher rates than students without disabilities (Bear et al., 2015). Students with Emotional Disturbance were found to be the most at-risk disability group, with approximately 83% of these participants reporting both frequent verbal and relational bullying and 45% reporting physical victimization (Bear et al., 2015). These percentages represent 14 times more verbal bullying and almost five times more physical bullying than that experienced by general education students, as well as 10 times more verbal and three times more physical victimization than that experienced by any other disability group (Bear et al., 2015). Another disability group that was statistically more likely to be victimized in their study was students with visual impairments, as this group was more than seven times as likely as students without disabilities to be verbally or relationally bullied and three to five times as likely to be frequent victims of verbal and relational bullying (Bear et al., 2015). Their findings support the prior hypotheses of researchers such as Swearer and colleagues, who in 2012 proposed that students with obvious physical and/or behavioral disabilities are most at risk for victimization (Swearer et al., 2012).

Why Are Some Disability Groups More Likely to Be Involved in Bullying?

Both Swearer et al. (2012) and Bear et al. (2015) demonstrated that students with Emotional Disturbance/Emotional Behavioral Disorder (ED/EBD) are one of the most at-risk groups for victimization and bully-victim status. Both groups of researchers reported victimization rates for this population of approximately 80% and perpetration rates of around 50% (Bear et al., 2015; Swearer et al. 2012).

Researchers have attempted to find potential reasons why students with ED/EBD are so much more likely to be involved in bullying than other student groups (Carran & Kellner, 2009). In 2009, for example, Carran and Kellner pointed out that characteristics of EBD are similar to characteristics of both bullies (often described as overconfident and aggressive) and their victims (often termed frail and socially withdrawn) (Carran & Kellner, 2009). They also noted that this is the student group most likely to be educated in separate classrooms or schools, due to the sometimes volatile nature of their disabilities, leading to more social isolation and less opportunities for the development of typical social skills (Carran & Kellner, 2009).

In their study, Carran and Kellner explored rates and types of bullying and victimization experienced by 407 students with EBD in 6th through 10th grade who were educated in private special education schools across New Jersey. The researchers were looking for characteristics within this group that might explain their increased involvement in bullying. Carran and Kellner found that although general education students and students with ED were similar in their percentages of students experiencing victimization, students with ED were victimized more frequently than their general education peers. In addition, they noted that fewer students with ED reported bullying others than general education students did, and that those students with ED who did in fact acknowledge bullying perpetration, were bullying at a much lower intensity than the general education students were (Carran & Kellner, 2009).

Carran and Kellner also observed that there were stark gender differences regarding victimization within students with ED, with girls with ED reporting significantly more victimization than boys with ED or students without disabilities (Carran & Kellner, 2009). The types of victimization girls with ED most often reported were as follows: direct verbal bullying (93%), indirect/relational bullying (62-75%), and sexual comments (64%) (Carran & Kellner,

2009). As bullying within the special education population is an emergent field in academic research, information on gender differences in special education bullying is almost nonexistent. There is, however, the general finding that girls with disabilities who continue to need services in upper grades tend to be more severely impacted by their disabilities than males, suggesting that the female participants in this study may have had more severe or externalizing forms of EBD than the males (Wagner, 1992 as cited in Carran & Kellner, 2009).

Impact of Inclusion on Bullying

Educational placement also plays a large role when considering disability specific bullying, particularly when considering students with learning disabilities and mild ASD. While educational placement decisions are typically made based on a student's academic ability and it is well documented that the general education classroom is the least restrictive and most preferable environment for students with special needs, the general education inclusive classroom can have the unintended effect of highlighting an included student's differences and shifting the bullying dynamic for students with high incidence disabilities. Three studies that investigated the impact of inclusion on bullying were those conducted by Luciano and Savage in 2007, who looked at students with learning disabilities; Zablotsky and colleagues in 2014, who looked at students with various forms of ASD; and Rose and colleagues in 2015, who took a global approach to the issue, comparing students with six disability categories to their typical peers as well as to students with the same disability status but in more or less inclusive placements (Luciano & Savage, 2007; Rose et al., 2015; Zablotsky et al., 2014).

Luciano and Savage focused their research on students with learning disabilities in upper elementary who were fully included in their classrooms with no pull-out services which could identify these students as receiving special education services (Luciano & Savage, 2007). Even

in this situation, students with learning disabilities self-reported significantly more victimization than their matched peers (Luciano & Savage, 2007). The only student or school factors that differentiated these two groups were measures of reading ability and receptive vocabulary (the specific learning disability status). All other factors (teacher, socioeconomic status, gender, age, etc.) were the same for both groups. In fact, when statistically controlling for and reducing only the measure of receptive language ability, the between group differences in victimization disappeared (Luciano & Savage, 2007). Resulting from this increased amount of disability specific bullying, students with learning disabilities reported having fewer friendships and lower self-perception in every measured area (scholastic competence, social acceptance, physical appearance, athletic competence, and global self-worth) (Luciano & Savage, 2007). In addition, these students with learning disabilities scored higher on measures of locus of control, indicating an external locus of control that is known to lead to learned helplessness and depression (Luciano & Savage, 2007).

In Luciano and Savage's study, despite a student's disability status remaining confidential (as it should) the characteristics of the disability differentiated students with learning disabilities enough from their typical peers to make them a target of bullying and social isolation within the classroom (Luciano & Savage, 2007). A similar trend was depicted by Zablotsky and colleagues in 2014 when they considered bullying risk factors for students with ASD (Zablotsky et al., 2014). In this study, parents of 1,176 students with ASD were surveyed regarding their child's experiences at school with bullying and victimization. Overall, 63% of the students with ASD had experienced victimization in their lives and 38% had been victimized within the past month (Zablotsky et al., 2014).

An interesting correlation emerged from the data that paints a clear picture of environmental and disability specific traits that can dictate bullying involvement. Zablotsky and colleagues consistently found that students with Asperger's were twice as likely to be victimized as well as to be classified as frequent victims over any other form of ASD (Zablotsky et al., 2014). Examining Zablotsky and colleagues' list of risk factors increasing the likelihood that a child with ASD would be bullied, it is hard not to note the resemblance of this list to the profile of any individual with high functioning Autism or Asperger's Syndrome. For example, they note that a child most likely to be bullied would attend public or general education school, have comorbid conditions, exhibit moderate to high autistic traits, experience difficulty making friends, be known for high academic achievement, and be included in the general education classroom more than 50% of the time (Zablotsky et al., 2014). The only identified protective factor against bullying for children with ASD was low academic achievement. This fact would suggest that students with ASD severe enough that inclusion would not be the LRE and who were therefore likely educated in a separate room or school from their typical peers, would also find some shelter there from the victimization that can unfortunately occur in an inclusive classroom (Zablotsky et al., 2014).

The findings of Luciano and Savage (2007) and Zablotsky et al. (2014) were confirmed and further extended by Rose and colleagues in their large-scale study in 2015, in which they systematically matched and compared the bullying experiences of 1,055 middle and high school students across six major disability groups (specific learning disabilities, other health impairments, intellectual disabilities, emotional behavioral disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and other/sensory related disabilities) both by educational placement (inclusive vs. restrictive settings) and in comparison to 1,055 exact matched typical peers in their region (Rose et al.,

2015). The results confirmed both the general findings of Rose and colleagues (2011) that students with specific disabilities are significantly more likely to experience victimization and engage in fighting behaviors than matched typical peers, and the specific findings of Luciano & Savage in 2007 and Zablotzky and colleagues in 2014 that students with specific learning disabilities and ASD are the most likely disability groups to be victimized in an inclusive classroom (Luciano & Savage, 2007; Rose et al., 2011; Rose et al., 2015; Zablotzky et al., 2014). Rose and colleagues (2015) also found that students with more severe disabilities such as EBD and intellectual disabilities were more likely to be victimized if they were in restrictive settings (self-contained or alternative school) than inclusive, and that there was more bullying perpetration among groups educated in restrictive settings (Rose et al., 2015).

This collection of studies examining the relationship between bullying and inclusion reveals that there is a complicated dynamic at work when considering bullying and the role a specific disability might play in determining a student's involvement in bullying. There is a fine line between a student's disability operating as either a risk for or a protective factor against bullying. The students with special needs who experience the most severe and frequent bullying are most often those who are able to perform and interact well enough to be included in the general education classroom but who also display disability specific characteristics that differentiate them enough from their peers to make them targets.

Legislation and Programming to Address This Problem

As the research indicates, there are a variety of specific causes of the disproportionate involvement in bullying and victimization of students with disabilities, ranging from the nature, visibility, and severity of students' symptoms to educational placement (Bear et al., 2015; Carran & Kellner, 2009; Luciano & Savage, 2007; Rose et al., 2011; Swearer et al., 2012; Wells et al.,

2019; Zablotzky et al., 2014). Whatever the causes of this problem may be, the bullying of students with disabilities is a major concern which needs to be addressed at the national, state, and local levels. An examination of some attempts to combat this problem at these various levels indicates both problems and progress.

National Level

Dr. Kathleen Conn's 2009 commentary in *West's Education Law Reporter* provided an overview of the troubled history of federal level protections against bullying in schools and indicated that IDEA can offer some level of help for families of students with disabilities attempting to protect their children's rights after they have experienced victimization impacting their educational placement or outcomes (Conn, 2009). Conn explained that the 1983 Supreme Court case of *Deshaney v. Winnebago County Department of Social Services* made legally protecting special education students from bullying and harassment difficult even today because of the court's ruling that the state is not legally required by the constitution to protect a student from harm unless they are a ward of the state, thus enacting a "special" relationship (Conn, 2009). A 1992 court case furthered this ruling, she wrote, stating that this special relationship cannot be created by enacting the in loco parentis roles of schools nor through the laws regarding mandatory school attendance (Conn, 2009). Conn explained that this 1992 ruling was especially heinous considering that the case involved ongoing violent sexual assaults of a hearing-impaired female student on school premises and the fact that a teacher was aware of these repeated assaults (Conn, 2009).

Only recently, according to Conn, have courts begun taking the protection of students, and particularly students with disabilities, seriously, using Title IX and IDEA as avenues to seek legal protection against bullying and harassment (Conn, 2009). Through IDEA, parents are

increasingly able to make legal claims against schools who fail to prevent and protect their students with disabilities from bullying, as often the repercussions of severe bullying or the school's inappropriate response to it, can cause the student to not receive a FAPE (Conn, 2009). This happens, Conn stated, when students are unable to make progress in their IEPs or are taken out of their LREs for significant amounts of time, since the most common way schools deal with bullying, particularly when a student with disabilities is involved, is to remove the victim from the classroom of the perpetrator(s) (Conn, 2009).

Yet even with the additional avenues IDEA provides to seek justice for victims of bullying, Conn explained, there remain stipulations that are a barrier to many claims being heard in court (Conn, 2009). Two of these stipulations, she asserted, are “deliberate indifference,” meaning that the school did nothing to stop the bullying from recurring, and “administrative exhaustion,” meaning that before a claim can be sent to court, the family needs to ask for and try the solutions provided by the school or district (Conn, 2009). Taken together, these two stipulations indicate that if the school took any action that could have reasonably stopped the bullying, these actions could delay or even nullify a bullying claim, and thus drag out the process and the abuse endured by the student (Conn, 2009). While pursuing protection from bullying for students with disabilities through IDEA offers some promise to these at-risk students, the problematic legal history and court decisions, as well as the current stipulations regarding how and when a claim can be made continue to make it difficult to secure legal protections under national law for victimized students with special needs even to this day.

State Level

Just as there are successes and shortcomings in the federal approach to combating the problem of bullying of students with disabilities, solutions at the state levels vary in their

specificity and effectiveness. All 50 states have now enacted an anti-bullying law, but some of these are stronger pieces of legislation than others (Keuny & Zirkel, 2012; Nikolaou, 2017).

In 2017, Dimitrios Nikolaou published a study examining whether state anti-bullying laws have an impact on reducing the number of bullying incidents within a school (Nikolaou, 2017). Nikolaou utilized both student and principal reports of bullying prevalence in 3,130 high schools every other year, taking into account whether the state had an anti-bullying law in place at the time, whether the policy required reporting, and whether there were in-school or criminal charges attached to bullying in that state (Nikolaou, 2017). Nikolaou found that having a state anti-bullying law in place did in fact appear to significantly reduce the amount of bullying that took place at each school (Nikolaou, 2017). Overall, there was an average reduction in bullying incidents by 8.4% after a state enacted anti-bullying legislation (Nikolaou, 2017). Nikolaou also determined that there were some delayed positive effects, and three years after a state law had been enacted, school level bullying incidents decreased by 10% (Nikolaou, 2017). Additionally, Nikolaou found that having a clear definition of bullying within the state law reduced bullying prevalence by 11.6% relative to states with unclear definitions, having mandatory reporting to school administrators reduced bullying incidents by 9.6% compared to voluntary or anonymous reporting (mandatory reporting to police did not have a significant effect), and having set school or criminal consequences in place deterred bullying significantly (Nikolaou, 2017).

Nikolaou's study illustrated the value of state anti-bullying laws in the fight against bullying (Nikolaou, 2017). These laws, however, vary greatly from state to state, with some clearly defining bullying and requiring strict reporting and investigation procedures and others offering only recommendations to school districts on how best to prevent, investigate and respond to bullying incidents (Cornell & Limber, 2016; Keuny & Zirkel, 2012). Additionally, as

of 2016, only about one-third of the state anti-bullying laws mentioned specific protected classes (based on race, sexual orientation, religion, gender, and disability status) (Cornell & Limber, 2016). There is some controversy as to whether state laws should specifically name student groups (such as students with disabilities) at higher risk for bullying, or whether these laws should make it clear that they provide equal protections for any student victimized by bullying regardless of student characteristics (Cornell & Limber, 2016). As is seen in federal legislation used to shield students with disabilities from bullying, state laws still offer no clear path or consensus on how to best ensure the protection of these students from peer victimization.

Local/School Level

Just as there is not a great deal of agreement between states about how best to legislate bullying protections for students with disabilities, there are many different opinions regarding how to address this issue at the school and local program level. As Good and colleagues asserted in their 2011 study, many of the stand-alone anti-bullying programs schools choose to adopt are destined to fail regardless of how well developed they are, primarily because they are reactive, hard to implement with fidelity, and give undue attention to the perpetrators (Good et al., 2011).

Some researchers have proposed that the solution to all the problems inherent in the stand-alone programs can be remedied by instead combating bullying by using Multi-Tiered System of Support programs like SWPBS (School Wide Positive Behavior Supports) and RTI (Response to Intervention) (Good et al., 2011; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012). These frameworks offer a better way to curb bullying as they are focused on prevention and early identification, and because they already have school-wide implementation and support built in, their lessons can be more smoothly integrated into daily instruction and routines (Good et al., 2011; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012). Good and colleagues and Rose and Monda-Amaya assert that the teaching of

expected behavior and the early identification and tiers of support provided by SWPBS are often enough to prevent bullying, but evidence-based bullying programs can be embedded into this framework to reduce bullying even further (Good et al., 2011; Rose and Monda-Amaya, 2012).

There are problems even within this proposed solution, however, as some students with disabilities are not able to access or be successful with SWPBS or other evidence based anti-bullying programs due to the nature of their disability or their educational placement. In a review of SWPBS in 2017, Kurth and colleagues discovered that there are specific loopholes in the wording of the common evaluation tools (SET, TIC, and BoQs) that allow for teachers and administrators to rate the implementation and effectiveness of the program highly, even when students with severe disabilities are not given access to the SWPBS curriculum due to their educational placements outside of the general education classroom (Kurth et al., 2017). In addition to the primary problem that students with the most severe disabilities who could certainly benefit from SWPBS are not even being introduced to it, there is a second problem, Kurth and colleagues pointed out, that if these students do not receive SWPBS and spend the majority of their time in separate classrooms, it is often not documented what behavior management strategies are being used with them, and unfortunately, these tertiary or intensive behavior interventions more commonly used in separate classrooms are often more reactionary or restraint based measures (Kurth et al., 2017).

It has also been documented that even when students with various disabilities are exposed to the same anti-bullying programs as the rest of the students in the school, they respond differently. In 2015, Espelage and colleagues looked at how an evidence based social emotional learning program that demonstrated success on a whole school level worked when looking only at students with disabilities (Espelage et al., 2015). The program is *Second Step: Student Success*

through Prevention, and the study was a three-year randomized control trial with sixth grade students with various disabilities. The researchers had done this study in 2013 on a large scale with all students in the five middle schools participating, and saw significant reductions in bully perpetration, victimization, and physical fighting at the school level as a result of this social emotional learning curriculum (Espelage et al., 2015).

Upon closer examination of the data, however, Espelage and colleagues discovered that the data for students with disabilities did not follow the same patterns as the general trend. In the 2015 publication of the study, Espelage and colleagues presented only the data from the 123 students who were in sixth grade at the baseline of the 2013 study and who had a documented disability (Espelage et al., 2015).. The results of this group demonstrated that the students who received the *Second Step* program which provided direct instruction, class discussions, and role plays about emotional regulation, empathy, communication skills, and problem solving skills (instead of the placebo *Stories of Us* program which was comprised of two films and worksheets) showed significant reductions in bullying perpetration over the three years of the study (Espelage et al., 2015). The program, however, was not found to significantly reduce the amount of victimization reported by this group, nor did it significantly decrease the amount of physical fighting reported for this group as it had in the overall data (Espelage et al., 2015) .

Looking at the data holistically, these researchers suggested that the program was successful in teaching students with disabilities the skills and strategies needed to resolve conflicts with others, but was less successful in teaching them how to transfer the lessons they had learned when they themselves were the victims of bullying (Espelage et al., 2015). When provoked, they often instead resorted to “fight or flight” instinctual physical fighting reactions (Espelage et al., 2015). This increased level of reactive behavior or physical fighting but not

increased verbal or relational bullying perpetration in students with disabilities was also reported in 2009 and 2011 studies by Rose and colleagues (Espelage et al., 2015).

The various studies regarding both stand-alone and school wide bullying prevention measures demonstrate that although it is of course crucial to include students with disabilities in all school based anti-bullying programming efforts, additional consideration needs to be given to how these students can best access these programs and to the fact that students with various disabilities will respond differently to these interventions than the general education population (Espelage et al., 2015; Good et al., 2011; Kurth et al., 2011; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012).

While the problem and prevalence of bullying in our schools is undisputed, it is important to note that our efforts to combat this epidemic must be preventive instead of reactive, include and be tailored to the needs of all student groups, account for the complexities of bullying, and lead to cohesive programs implemented and supported by all staff members in order to be successful.

Teacher Trainings and Programs

With all the information known about bullying and its impact on students with disabilities, the need for comprehensive and effective teacher training in this area is evident. In 2012, Kennedy and colleagues surveyed teachers from across the United States and found that 42% of them taught in schools that did not have an anti-bullying policy, and 86% had not received any anti-bullying training in either undergraduate or graduate teacher preparation programs (Kennedy et al., 2012). In this same study, administrators reported feeling more comfortable than teachers in handling bullying situations and indicated that they were less likely than teachers to feel that teacher training in bullying is necessary (Kennedy et al., 2012). The responses of the principals in this study demonstrate a prevalent mindset that bullying is a problem that should be handled primarily at the administrative level. Administrators who believe

this are perhaps reluctant to provide bullying intervention training to teachers since they believe that these are issues that they themselves should be handling.

Research has shown that this view is problematic, however, as many teachers express that they want and need training in and guidance on anti-bullying policies and strategies (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Bradshaw and colleagues considered this fact in their 2013 study in which they conducted a survey of 5,064 NEA members (teachers and Educational Support Professionals), finding that while 92% of teachers and 96% of ESPs stated that their schools had bullying policies, only 80% of the teachers and 88% of the ESPs felt that these policies were effective (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Furthermore, although teachers indicated that they were 23% more likely to have received training in their school bullying policies than ESPs, they were also 60% more likely than ESPs to report that these policies were unclear and hard to implement (Bradshaw et al., 2013). The study also indicated that despite both teachers and ESPs reporting that they were most comfortable intervening in bullying situations that involved students with disabilities (in comparison to bullying incidents involving race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation), approximately half of the participants (48% of teachers and 58% of ESPs) still reported needing additional training in this area (Bradshaw et al., 2013).

Bradshaw and colleagues also highlighted the need to involve ESPs in bullying prevention and intervention, as far fewer ESPs than teachers reported receiving training and feeling confident about intervening (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Although overall, there were more bullying incidents reported to teachers than to ESPs, researchers noted that students reported bullying incidents involving students with disabilities to ESPs more often than they did to teachers (Bradshaw et al., 2013). This finding is significant, as ESPs could be an important link in combating disability specific bullying because paraeducators in particular often work

individually with students with disabilities for multiple years, and the one-on-one nature of their interactions with students with disabilities provides the opportunity and feeling of safety needed to report acts of bullying or victimization (Bradshaw et al., 2013).

Just as it is important to recognize the important role ESPs can play in the fight against bullying, it is also crucial to include ESPs in a whole school approach to bullying prevention and intervention. As research has shown, without whole school buy-in and fidelity for three to five years, most bullying prevention and intervention programs will be ineffective (O'Brennan et al., 2014). In 2014, O'Brennan and colleagues conducted research on the same population of NEA members surveyed by Bradshaw and colleagues in 2013, asking these teachers and ESPs about their feelings regarding student, staff and administration connectedness at their schools (O'Brennan et al., 2014). This study found that teachers who felt supported by their colleagues were significantly more comfortable and likely to intervene in bullying situations, particularly those involving students with disabilities (O'Brennan et al., 2014).

Not only is a whole school approach needed, but all teachers need specific training in bullying prevention and intervention, and this training needs to occur at both the pre-service and in-service levels in order to be most effective. One example of the impact such training can have was evident in a 2011 study by Beyda-Lorie and colleagues at Northeastern Illinois University (Beyda-Lorie et al., 2011). These researchers examined the effectiveness of teaching pre-service special education teachers the Curriculum Infusion (CI) model for addressing real life issues in the classroom, including bullying and social isolation (Beyda-Lorie et al., 2011). This model was taught by three special education faculty members in undergraduate and graduate level special education courses at Northeastern Illinois University. The 42 students in these courses took pre and post-tests assessing their knowledge of and confidence in addressing real life issues in the

classrooms, as well as the effect CI training might have on pre-service special education teachers' beliefs about their role in prevention education (Beyda-Lorie et al., 2011). The results of the study demonstrated significant differences between the students' pre and post test scores for understanding the severity and importance of developing curriculum that addresses real life issues for students with disabilities and demonstrated that they were significantly more confident in their ability to do so after being trained in CI techniques (Beyda-Lorie et al., 2011).

While it is very important to build prevention training into pre-service education to create a more prepared teaching force, and studies such as this one illustrate the effectiveness of such training curriculum, efforts also need to be taken to improve in-service education and training to help enact more immediate change in the problem of bullying and victimization of students with disabilities. In 2018, Ortiz-Bush and Lee conducted a study illustrating the fact that many special education teachers enter the field with limited or no experience with bullying prevention strategies and showed that after receiving training in these strategies, they experienced a dramatic difference in their feelings of preparedness to address bullying in their schools (Ortiz-Bush & Lee, 2018). Specifically, these researchers examined the preparation and confidence levels of 30 novice special education teachers in regards to the bullying prevention and intervention training received during their pre-service education and in-service training, as well as the effect of a workshop on their understanding of the definition of bullying, anti-bullying laws and policies at the state and district levels, and best practices in bullying prevention and intervention (Ortiz-Bush & Lee, 2018).

Ortiz- Bush and Lee discovered that 28 of the 30 teachers (93 %) had received no pre-service training in bullying prevention or intervention and the remaining two had received less than two hours; also, only nine participants (30 %) reported any school or district level training

in bullying prior to this study (Ortiz-Bush & Lee, 2018). Only 79% of these teachers reported that they knew their schools' bullying policies and 43% reported that they had no rules related to bullying posted in the classroom (Ortiz-Bush & Lee, 2018). After the 90 minute workshop, all but one teacher reported feeling better prepared to identify and address bullying, with many stating that they had not known there were bullying related laws in place until this workshop and were now curious to learn more about these laws as well as about additional strategies in future workshops on the topic (Ortiz-Bush & Lee, 2018).

Chapter 3: Method

This study is based on an exploratory survey created by the principal investigator. The survey drew on the findings of prior research in the area and aimed at gathering information about what teachers and teacher candidates know and believe about bullying, especially as it pertains to students with disabilities. The questions also allowed the researcher to explore the education and preparation of these participants in this area, asking participants to demonstrate knowledge of current literature and legislation in the area of bullying as well as report on the quantity and quality of the education preparation programs they attended and the district provided bullying training they received if they are in-service teachers. This study and survey instrument have received IRB approval.

Sample

A total of 369 potential participants were invited to take the online survey. The potential participants for this survey consisted of 184 general and special education pre-service teachers and teacher candidates enrolled in one of multiple residency courses during the Fall 2020 semester at a regional university. Each residency course is a 15-week supervised observation and teaching experience under the direction of a participating mentor teacher in either a general or special education classroom in a school in the community. Residency courses are required for all education majors and are taken in the final year of their teacher preparation programs. The online survey was also distributed to 185 general and special education in-service teachers from the surrounding counties who were part of the mentor teacher network for these residency courses. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a convenience sample was used based on a previously constructed contact list held by the university.

Instrument/ Survey

The online survey for this study consisted of 18 or 21 multiple choice questions (if a participant identified themselves as a pre-service teacher, three questions regarding number of years teaching, licensure areas, and district provided training were not displayed to them). The questions were organized into five categories (demographics, general knowledge of basic bullying facts, special education students and bullying, my state, and my school), with two to five questions each displayed on its own page. As stated before, these questions and the survey layout were designed by the principal investigator based on an extensive literature review and the research questions of this study. While it was evaluated by a panel of experts in the field and found to have face validity, the instrument has not been formally assessed for reliability or other forms of validity.

Survey Flow:

Consent

When a participant first opens the survey from the anonymous link sent to their email, they are taken to the consent page which displays the full consent form for them to read or scroll through. After doing so, in order to see the rest of the survey, the participant must state that they have read the above information, are 18 years of age or older, and agree to participate in this survey. If they choose “do not agree,” this choice immediately exits them from the survey.

Demographics

After clicking “I agree,” participants are taken to the demographics page which asks them whether they are a pre-service or in-service teacher, as well as what grade level they teach or are majoring in (Elementary, Middle, or High School). If a participant answers “pre-service,” they

skip questions 3 and 4, which ask the in-service teachers how many years they have been teaching and their licensure category.

General Bullying Facts

After the demographics section, all participants proceed to the general bullying facts page containing five questions. The first two questions describe two ambiguous student conflicts that may or may not be characterized as bullying, both involving a student with disabilities as the potential victim. The participant is asked whether the scenarios meet the criteria for bullying and must choose to respond yes or no. The following three questions in this section ask the participant to identify the four types of bullying, the four roles an individual can play in the bullying dynamic, and the grade level at which bullying is most prevalent. These are single answer multiple choice questions with different collections of correct and distractor terms.

Special Education and Bullying

There are three questions displayed on the special education and bullying page. The first two present the participant with statements regarding students with disabilities being more likely to be victims than students without disabilities and/or more likely to be bullies than students without disabilities, to which the participant must respond using a five-point Likert style scale. The third question is a ranking question in which 10 student groups of various genders and disability statuses are listed and participants are asked to rank the student groups from most to least likely to be victimized.

My State

There are three questions directly addressing Tennessee state anti-bullying laws and district procedures. The first question was taken from Tennessee Code 49-6-4503 which is Tennessee's updated anti-bullying and harassment law (2014) detailing what each school district

is required to address in their individual bullying policies and procedures. Five key components of this law were extracted and participants were asked to answer yes or no regarding whether their district had informed them of the following: the district's definition of bullying, the district's procedure for reporting an act of bullying, the district's designated school official for policy implementation, the district's timeline from when a report is made to when an investigation must begin, and the district's definition of consequences for a student who is found to have committed an act of bullying. The following two questions asked the participants whether Tennessee's anti bullying law covers cyberbullying and/or bullying that occurs off-campus or outside of school hours, and whether it provides special protections for students with disabilities in a Yes/ No/ I don't know format.

My School

The final page of the survey consists of six questions. The first question asks for the participant's perception of whether bullying is a problem in their school, and they are required to respond on a four-point Likert style scale. The following four questions ask for the participant's knowledge of whether their school has an anti-bullying policy or program and if so, to indicate whether that policy or program is a nationally recognized one, the frequency of their in-service training on that policy (if they are an in-service teacher), and their perception of whether the policy or program adequately addresses the needs of students with disabilities. The final question asks the participant to respond on a four-point Likert style scale regarding whether their teacher preparation program addressed state bullying policies and strategies for identifying and intervening in bullying situations.

Data Collection

The data was collected using the Qualtrics XM survey platform (September/October, 2020). The survey was distributed to the 369 potential participants on the residency contact lists held by the university via an invitation email sent to their school or work email address on September 23, 2020, with an anonymous link to the survey embedded in the email. Follow-up emails were sent on September 30, 2020 and October 6, 2020. The survey was closed on October 9, 2020, and the data was transferred to a SPSS spreadsheet for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS (version 25) statistical software. Analysis consisted of descriptive statistics as well as t-tests examining mean comparisons between selected grouping variables.

Chapter 4: Results

Response Rate

Out of the 369 participants contacted, 105 completed surveys were submitted, yielding an overall response rate of 28.4%. Of those 105 participants, 45 identified as pre-service teachers and 60 identified as in-service teachers. Given this, the response rate for pre-service teachers was 24.4% (45/184) and the response rate for in-service teachers was slightly higher at 32.4% (60/185). No data was discarded; the only surveys not included in this study were those that remained incomplete a week after being opened. These incomplete surveys were automatically deleted by the *Qualtrics* survey platform at that point.

Grouping Variables

The demographic criteria were used to make four sets of between group comparisons among the participants. The first set of between-group comparisons were between the 45 pre-service and the 60 in-service teachers. The second group comparison was by grade level. The 25 respondents working or majoring in middle or high school education were compared to the 80 elementary education teachers and teaching candidates. The third group comparison set concerned licensure. Special education and other related service providers were combined ($n=20$) and compared to the 41 general education respondents. The fourth and final group comparison was teaching experience in years. The 11 teachers who had taught less than 10 years were compared to the 36 teachers who had taught 11 or more years.

Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers

Significant differences were found between pre-service and in-service teachers in three of the four analyzed categories (see Table 1). In-service teachers ($M=95.00$, $SD=15.13$) scored significantly higher $t(68)=-1.995$, $p=.05$, than pre-service teachers ($M=86.67$, $SD=24.78$) with

regards to the identification of bullying behaviors. In law based knowledge, in-service teachers (M=40.00, SD= 27.3) also scored significantly higher $t(103)=-2.139$, $p=.033$, than pre-service teachers (M=28.89, SD=24.97). Additionally, in-service teachers (M=56.43, SD=13.77) scored significantly higher $t(103)=-3.186$, $p=.002$, than pre-service teachers (M=47.3, SD=15.47) in the overall average score.

There was no significant difference, $t(103)=-1.731$, $p=.086$, between groups on bullying knowledge questions, despite in-service teachers (M=41.67, SD=23.47) scoring slightly higher than pre-service teachers (M=33.33, SD=25.62).

Table 1

Mean Comparisons Between Pre-service and In-service Teachers

	Pre-service teachers		In-service teachers		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Identification	86.6667	24.77168	95.00	15.12658	.050*
Knowledge	33.333	25.62354	41.6667	23.47014	.091
TN Law	28.8889	24.97473	40.000	27.30866	.033*
Overall	47.30	15.48	56.43	13.77	.002*

*Significance set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Grade Level

When middle and high school teachers and teacher candidates were combined and compared to the elementary teachers and teacher candidates, significant differences arose only in the general knowledge questions (see table 2). Elementary teachers (M=42.08, SD=24.16) scored significantly higher $t(103)=3.085$, $p=.003$, than middle and high school teachers (M=25.33, SD=22.11) in this area.

There were slight but statistically insignificant differences between the two groups regarding identification and law-based knowledge, with Middle and High school teachers scoring slightly higher in these areas.

Table 2

Mean Comparisons Between Elementary and Upper Grades Teachers/ Teacher Candidates

	Elementary (K-5) teachers		Middle and High School teachers		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Identification	91.25	20.70743	92.000	18.70829	.872
Knowledge	42.0833	24.15593	25.3333	22.11083	.003*
TN Law	34.3750	25.89383	38.0000	29.86079	.557
Overall	53.93	15.07	48.00	14.80	.088

*Significance set at $p \leq 0.05$.

General Education Teachers and Special Education Teachers

There were no significant differences between general education teachers and special education and related service providers found in any of the four categories, although general education teachers had slightly higher means in all four categories (See table 3).

Table 3

Mean Comparison Between General Education and Special Education or Other Professionals

	General Education		Special Education and Other Related Professionals (OT,PT,SLP)		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Identification	96.3415	13.18258	92.50000	18.31738	.35
Knowledge	44.7154	23.10574	36.6667	23.93949	.212
TN Law	40.2439	27.88259	37.5000	27.50598	.718

Overall	58.19	12.53	52.86	15.44	.154
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*Significance set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Experience Level

The number of years teaching did not have a significant effect on scores in any of the four knowledge-based categories, although more experienced teachers scored slightly higher on the identification questions and less experienced teachers indicated slightly more knowledge regarding general bullying facts (see table 4).

Table 4

Mean Comparison of In-Service Teachers by Experience Level

	Taught 1-10 years		Taught 11+ years		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Significance
Identification	90.9091	20.2260	95.8333	14.01530	.365
Knowledge	45.4545	16.81750	42.5926	21.98284	.694
TN Law	40.9091	30.15113	40.2778	26.23913	.947
Overall	57.1429	14.28571	57.14129	12.77753	1.00

*Significance set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Overall Findings

While there were statistically significant differences between many of the groups in the analyzed categories, overall, all participants and participant groups struggled significantly in general bullying knowledge and knowledge of Tennessee anti-bullying law. All groups averaged less than 50% in these categories (the range was 25-44%).

Ranking

Measures of central tendency (modal distribution) were used to assess the perceived risk level of victimization for 10 student groups. Participants were given 10 student groups and asked to rank them from most to least at-risk (1 being most at-risk and 10 being least at-risk) for bullying victimization at school. The modal ranking for this question was distributed as follows:

1. Students with a severe disability (intellectual, severe ASD, etc.)
2. Students with a physical disability (orthopedic impairment, medically fragile)
3. Students with a sensory disability (visual or hearing impairment)
4. Students with a mild disability (learning disability, ADHD, mild ASD)
5. Students with emotional-behavioral disability (EBD)
6. Students with a mood disorder (anxiety, depression, etc.)
7. Students who are English Language Learners (ELL/ESL)
8. Female students regardless of disability status
9. Male students regardless of disability status
10. Students without disabilities

This modal distribution list indicates that the perception of the participants was that students with severe intellectual or physical disabilities are more at-risk to be bullied than students with mild or no observable disabilities. They perceived female students to be more at risk of being bullied than male students regardless of disability status.

Additional Descriptive Statistics

Perceptions of Bullying

Below are the descriptive statistics for the questions that addressed participants' perceptions of the roles students with disabilities are most likely to play in bullying, as well as their impressions of how prevalent they feel bullying is at their respective schools (see figure 1-3 and table 5). On the two perception questions regarding roles within the bullying dynamic of students with disabilities, the majority of participants (87.62%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that students with disabilities were more likely to be bullied than students

without disabilities, and the majority (63.81%) also disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that students with disabilities were more likely to be bullies (see figures 1 and 2, and table 5). Additionally, when asked to reflect on whether bullying is a problem at their school, the majority (66.67%) reported that it was not a problem (see figure 3 and table 5).

Figure 1

Students with Disabilities are More Likely to be Bullied than Students Without Disabilities

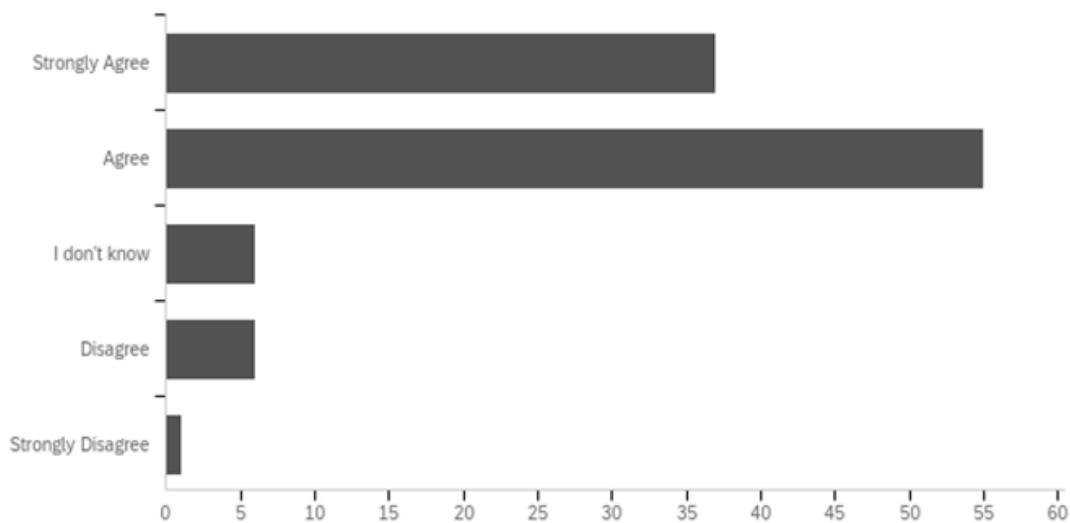


Figure 2

Students with Disabilities are More Likely to be Bullies than Students Without Disabilities

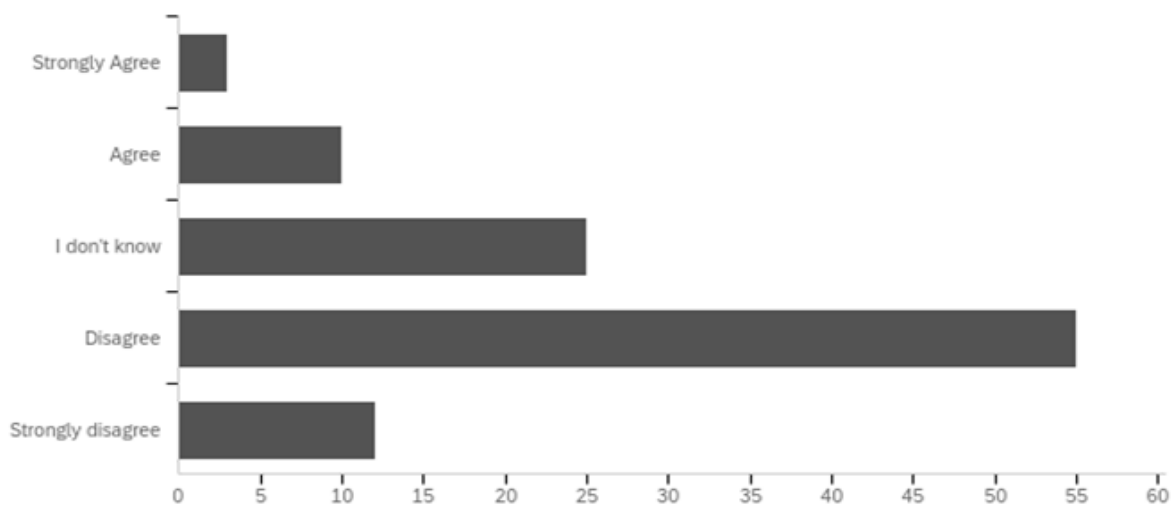


Figure 3

Bullying is a Problem at My School

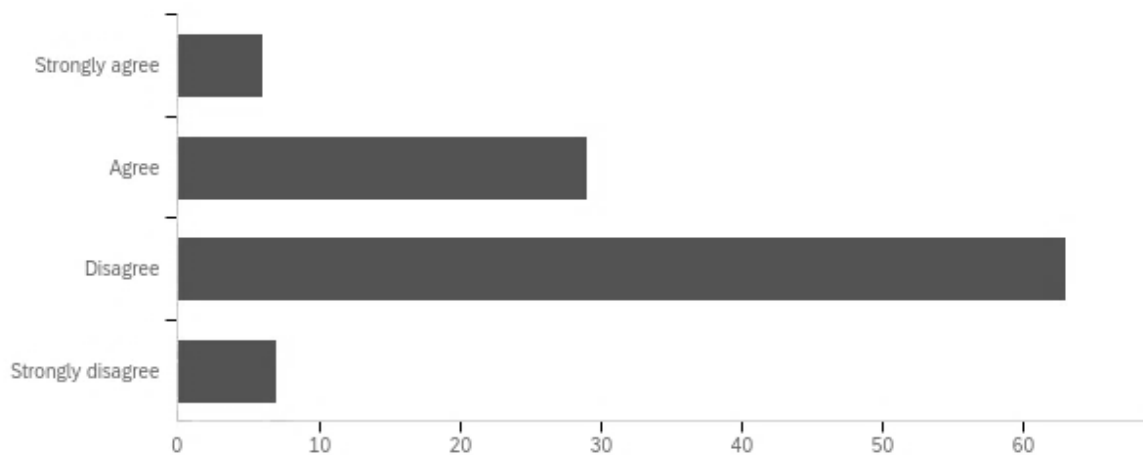


Table 5

Descriptive Statistics on the Perception-Based Questions

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I don't know
Students with disabilities are more likely to be bullied than students without disabilities	37(35.24%)	55(52.38%)	6(5.71%)	1(.95%)	6(5.71%)
Students with disabilities are more likely to be bullies than students without disabilities	3(2.86%)	10(9.52%)	55(52.38%)	12(11.43%)	25(23.81%)
Bullying is a problem at my school	6(5.71%)	29(27.62%)	63(60%)	7(6.67%)	N/A

Pre-Service and In-Service Training and Policies

Descriptive statistics were also utilized to ask participants about the presence and effectiveness of anti-bullying policies at their school (figure 4-6), as well as the presence and effectiveness of prevention and intervention training they may have received during in-service or pre-service education (figures 7 and 8). 81 participants (77.14%) reported that the school at

which they work has an anti-bullying program or policy, while 7 participants reported that there was no program or policy in place, and 17 participants were not sure (Figure 4). Of the participants who reported a program or policy, only 47 reported using a nationally recognized bullying or behavior management system (Figure 5). When asked if the bullying program or policy in place adequately addressed the needs of students with disabilities, the vast majority (83.81%) agreed (60%) or strongly agreed (23.81%) that it did, leaving only 16.14% reporting that it did not (Figure 6).

When all participants were asked about whether their teacher preparation program had addressed state bullying policies and identification and intervention strategies, the majority (58.1%) reported that it had not (Figure 7). When the 61 in-service teachers were asked how often their school provides them professional development regarding their anti-bullying policy, 39 participants (63.93%) reported that they received this professional development yearly, 12 participants (19.67%) reported receiving it every couple of years, 4 participants (6.56%) reporting receiving it two or more times a year, and 6 participants (9.84%) reported that they had never received any in-service training in this area (Figure 8). In-service teachers were also asked to respond yes or no in response to whether their district had made them aware of five critical components of their anti-bullying policy (definition of bullying, district reporting procedure, designated official, investigation timeline, and consequences for students involved). For all five components, the majority of participants (57.38-93.44%) reported that their district had informed them (Table 6).

Figure 4

The School I Work at Has an Anti-Bullying Policy or Program

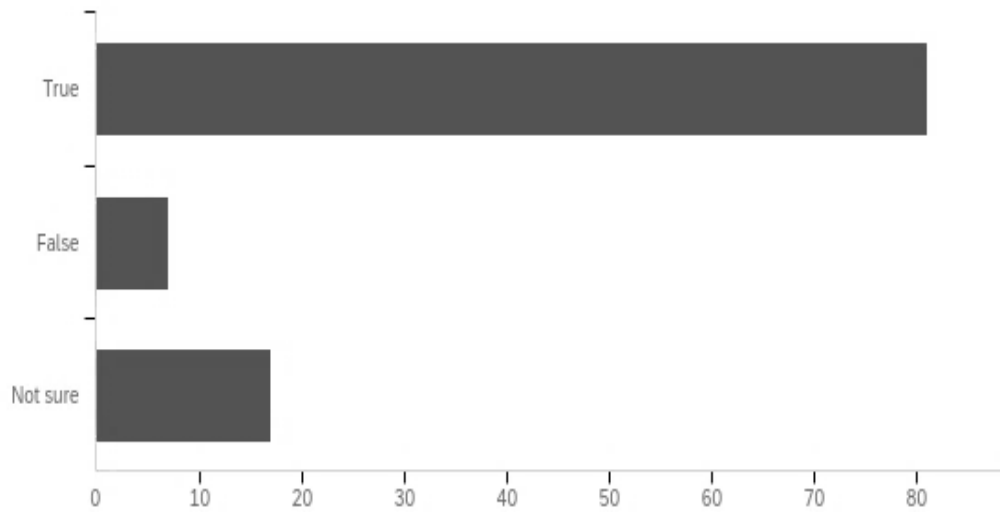


Figure 5

*Does Your School Use a Nationally Recognized Bullying or Behavior Management Program
(Such as SWPBS, RTI2-B, STARS, Move2Stand, SecondStep, Olweus, etc.)?*

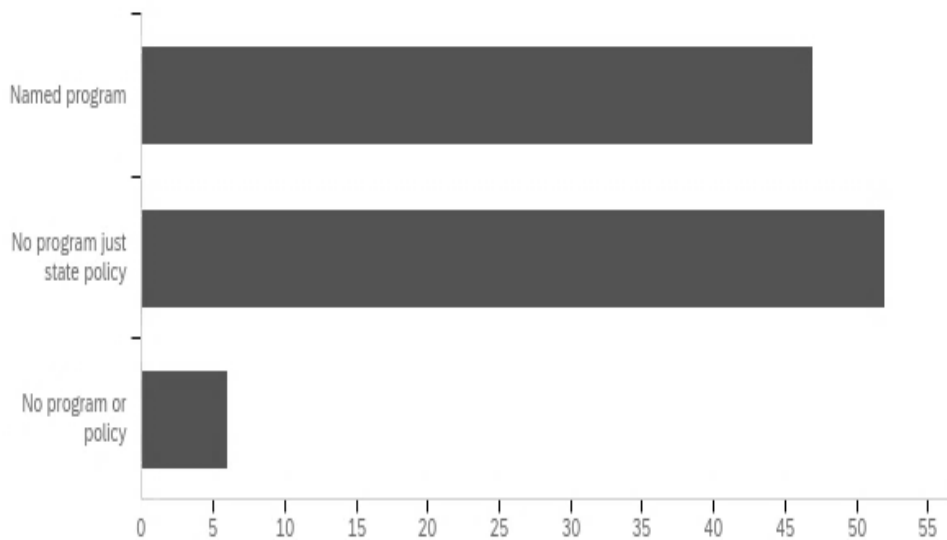


Figure 6

My School's Program/Policy Adequately Addresses the Needs of Students with Disabilities

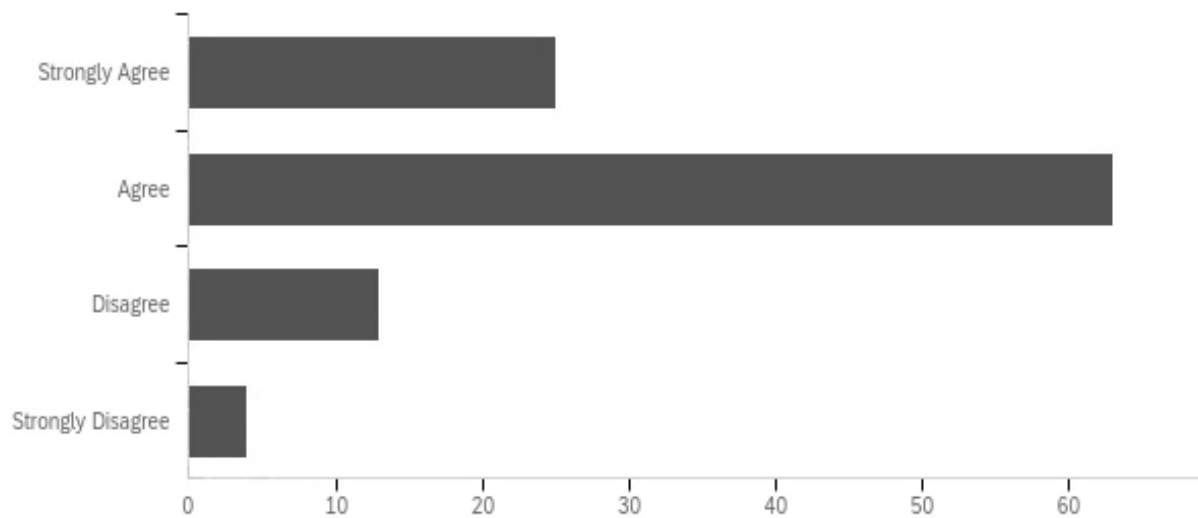


Figure 7

My Teacher Preparation Program Addressed State Bullying Policies and Strategies for Identifying and Intervening in Bullying Situations

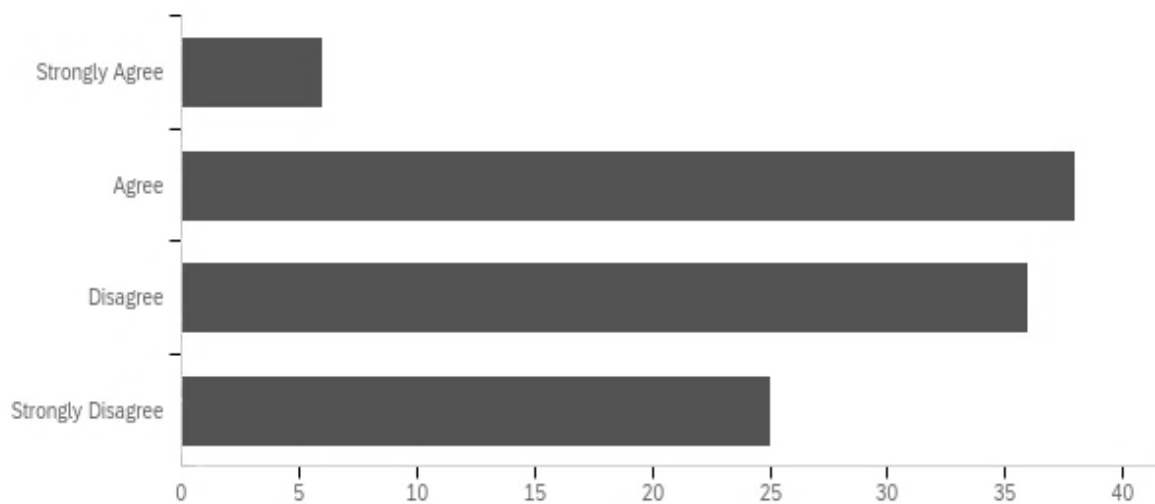


Figure 8

How Often Do You Receive In-service Training Regarding the Bullying Policy at Your School?

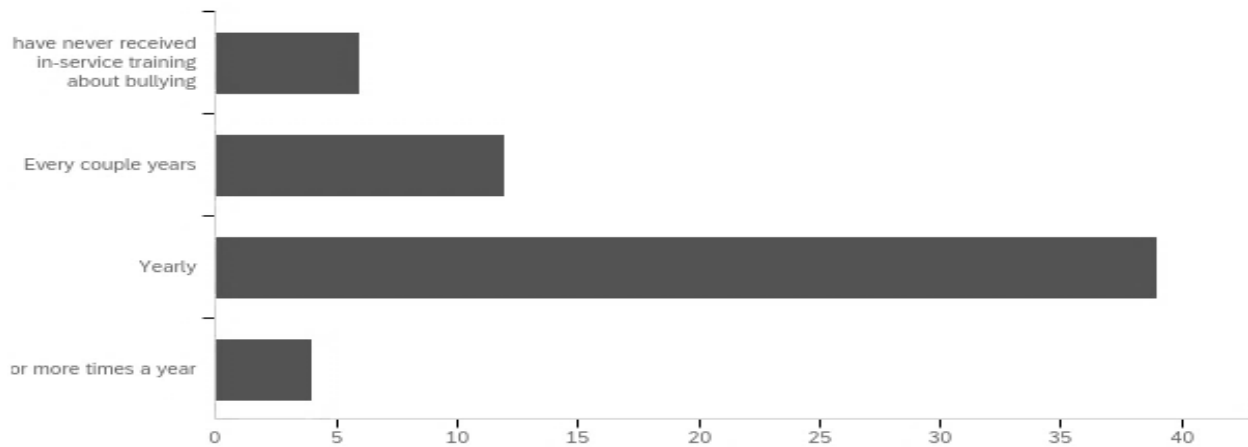


Table 6

Has your District Made You Aware of the Following?

	Yes	No
The district's definition of bullying and/or harassment	55(90.16%)	6(9.84%)
The district's procedure for reporting an act of bullying or harassment	57(93.44%)	4(6.56%)
The designated school official responsible for implementation of the policy	53(86.89%)	8(13.11%)
The amount of time the designated school official has from receiving a report of bullying to beginning an investigation of that report	35(57.38%)	26(42.62%)
The consequences for a student found to have committed an act of bullying or harassment	44(72.13%)	17(27.87%)

Chapter 5: Discussion

Conclusions and Connections

The purpose of this study was to address the question of whether pre-service and in-service teachers located in the Southeastern region of the United States where the study was conducted have received adequate training in the area of bullying facts and laws related to students with disabilities to be able to identify and address bullying situations involving this student group. The results demonstrated that 58.1% of teachers and teacher candidates in this study felt that their teacher preparation programs had not addressed bullying sufficiently (figure 7). The participants' self-reported lack of adequate pre-service education in the area of bullying was further supported by the result that despite both groups having scored similarly in the fact based knowledge section of the survey, the in-service teachers were more knowledgeable about Tennessee's bullying law than the pre-service teachers were, as well as by the finding that the in-service teachers were better at identifying bullying involving students with disabilities when given an ambiguous student conflict (Table 1).

Given that 58% of this study's participants reported that their pre-service training had not sufficiently addressed bullying prevention or intervention it appears that more attention needs to be paid to this issue in teacher preparation programs in this area of the southeast where the study was conducted. The fact that the scores of all participant groups were below 50% for measures of general bullying knowledge and knowledge of Tennessee's anti-bullying law components (despite statistically significant differences between pre-service and in-service teachers) also merits attention in teacher training curriculum. These results are even more troubling when it is noted that the participating pre-service teachers were in the final year of their teacher preparation programs and the participating in-service teachers were not randomly

selected but were instead part of the university's mentor teacher network of master teachers. Therefore, both groups would be expected to be highly proficient at this stage of their education or career.

These results, however, are more encouraging when compared to results in some previous publications mentioned in earlier chapters of this study. For example, Kennedy et al. (2012) reported eight years ago that 86% of educators participating in their study had not received any pre-service anti-bullying training at all (at either the undergraduate or graduate level), and just two years ago, Ortiz-Bush and Lee (2018), found that 93% of new special educators reported that they had received no pre-service training in bullying prevention or intervention, with the remaining 7 % stating that they had received less than two hours of such training (Ortiz-Bush and Lee, 2018). Looking at the present study's results regarding pre-service training in context of these prior studies, it appears that in the region of Tennessee in which the study was conducted, bullying is beginning to be discussed at least minimally in pre-service teaching programs, even though it needs to be a more consistent pre-service curriculum item.

The present study also demonstrated that while there are certainly many improvements still to be made to school bullying programs and policies, there are also some signs of progress to be seen in the visibility of and teacher confidence in these policies and programs in the Tennessee schools represented by the pre-service and in-service teachers surveyed. The need for improvement can be seen in the finding that only 77% of participants reported having a bullying policy in place that they knew about. Additionally, of this percentage, less than half of respondents reported that their school used an evidence-based bullying or behavior management system that went above mere compliance with the state policy (Figures 4 and 5). However, teachers in the present study were highly confident in the effectiveness of their school policies,

with approximately 84% of participants reporting that they felt their bullying policy adequately addressed the needs of students with disabilities and 67% of participants reporting that bullying was not a problem at their school (Figure 3 and 6, Table 5).

These findings of the present study are somewhat similar to those of Ortiz-Bush and Lee (2018), where 79% of participants reported that they knew there was a bullying policy in place at their school, but 43% indicated that they did not have specific classroom rules in alignment with this policy (Ortiz-Bush & Lee, 2018). The percentages reported in the present study and in Ortiz-Bush & Lee's 2018 study are, however, better than the finding in Kennedy et al. in 2012 that 42% of teachers nationwide taught in schools without a bullying policy (Kennedy et al., 2012). Another indication of progress can potentially be seen in the fact that while in Bradshaw et al. (2013) only 55% of teachers and 46% of ESPs reported having received training in their bullying policies, approximately 90% of teachers in the present study reported having participated in in-service training in the past, with the majority (64%) reporting yearly training in their school's bullying policy (Figure 8).

The present study also revealed both positives and areas in need of improvement regarding the content of the in-service training that the approximately 90 % of teachers reported receiving. This training in many aspects appears adequate, evidenced by the fact that most teachers reported that they were aware of the five critical components of the state bullying policy assessed in the survey. These were: definition, reporting procedure, designated official, investigation timeline, and consequences for bullying in their district. However, more attention could be placed on the timeline and consequences as far fewer teachers knew these in comparison to definition and procedure (Table 6).

Other findings of the present study included the fact that elementary teachers were significantly more knowledgeable in general bullying facts regarding bullying types, roles, and prevalence than middle or high school teachers, and general education teachers scored slightly higher in all categories than did special education or related service providers (Table 2 and 3). These results make sense given the typical set up of schools, where elementary teachers stay with the same group of students for the whole day, whereas in upper grades students transfer classrooms and teachers repeatedly so elementary teachers are more likely to witness bullying occurring within their classroom. The results are also understandable in the context of what is known about bullying behavior patterns as discussed in Swearer et al. (2012) and Hartley et al. (2015), who explained that bullying often starts with physical aggression in the early years, transferring to verbal or relational bullying in upper grades as communication skills develop, and that the prevalence increases each year through elementary school, hitting a peak in seventh grade and decreasing into the high school years (Hartley et al., 2015; Swearer et al., 2012).

Another finding of the present study concerned the attitudes towards various disability groups in terms of their perceived risk of bullying victimization. Participants were given 10 student groups and asked to rank them in their opinion from most likely to least likely to be bullied. The results indicated the position each student group was most often placed in (modal distribution). This modal distribution demonstrated some clear patterns in how participants perceived the issue of bullying and students with disabilities. Participants ranked all students with a disability in the first half of the slots and ranked students with the most severe disabilities (intellectual, physical, sensory) as the most at risk. They ranked the students with milder disabilities and differences (LD/ADHD, EBD, mood disorders, ELL) in the middle slots, and

ranked students without disabilities as the least likely to be bullied, but also indicated the perception that females were more likely than males to be involved in bullying (see Ranking).

Some aspects of this modal distribution illustrate correct understanding of bullying risk factors. For example, these participants did recognize that students with disabilities are overrepresented in the bullying dynamic as found by Rose et al. (2011), who reported that students with disabilities were two to three times more likely to be involved in bullying, and Swearer et al. (2012), who reported that students with observable disabilities were more likely to be bullied (Rose et al., 2011; Swearer et al., 2012). The modal distribution, however, was at odds with the finding in Swearer et al. (2012) that students with behavioral disabilities were (along with those with observable disabilities) one of the most likely groups to be victimized (Swearer et al., 2012). It also went against Bear and colleagues' 2015 finding that students with intellectual disabilities and orthopedic impairments were the not the most likely but, in fact, the least likely student group to be bullied (Bear et al., 2015). The severity of these disabilities, they explain, protected these students from victimization so that they actually experienced far less victimization than students without disabilities (Bear et al. 2015).

The participants' perception that females were more likely to be victimized than males regardless of disability is also interesting, as research has been inconclusive on gender differences within the bullying dynamic, but has suggested that physical bullying is more common in boys and relational bullying is most common in girls (Hartley et al., 2015) and that girls with disabilities may be more likely to be bullied than boys regardless of disability (Carran & Kellner, 2009). This question did not differentiate between bullying types or allow for such specific comparisons, so it is impossible to know how participants interpreted this question.

Overall, this modal distribution ranking question was beneficial in understanding the general consensus of the future and practicing teachers on the risk and protective factors a student's characteristics (gender and disability status) can play in regard to bullying involvement. From this question, it is evident that the educators in this study understand that students with disabilities are more likely to be targets of bullying and that gender plays a role in the bullying dynamic. They believed, however, that the severity of a student's disability is directly linked to their victimization risk, but at least one study has shown that there is actually an inverse relationship between these two variables, with the severest of disabilities actually acting in some sense as a protective factor against victimization (Bear et al., 2015).

Limitations and Strengths

The primary limitation of this study came from the fact that the survey instrument utilized had not been piloted or formally assessed for measures of reliability or validity, although it was reviewed by a committee of special education teaching faculty members and given approval to use for this study due to the exploratory nature of the topic and the short timeline available to complete the study. A second limitation was the use of convenience sampling, only distributing to students and teachers already affiliated with the university and for whom the university already had contact information. Related to this use of convenience sampling was the quality of the selected educators. The in-service teachers who were invited to participate were from the university's mentor teacher network and had gone through the university's vetting process for this role. Therefore, this population of teachers would not be representative of a true random sample of teachers in the area as these mentor teachers are chosen by the university for their exemplary records and performance. A more random and wide-scale sampling measure such as distributing the survey to all principals in the surrounding area or state for them in turn to

circulate to their teachers should have been utilized to eliminate this limitation. These two limitations make it difficult to generalize based on the results.

An additional limitation came from the missing data due to technical difficulties within *Qualtrics*, particularly on the ranking question. Due to these difficulties, the principal investigator had to make question 12 optional and allow for partial completion on that question in order to increase the number of respondents. Analysis of this question also revealed that participants may have used a response pattern to answer more quickly instead of thoughtfully ranking each student group. This missing data and response pattern skewed the mean and median measures to the point that they were unusable and therefore, only modal distribution provided meaningful results.

Despite these limitations, two strengths of this study were in response rate and use of force response. Possibly due to the use of convenience sampling and only distributing to 369 people (184 pre-service teachers, and 185 in-service teachers), this study received 105 responses in approximately three weeks, resulting in an overall response rate of 28.4%, which is significantly higher than many survey research studies. The second strength of this study was in the number of complete responses received because of the use of force responses for the majority of the questions (all but question 12). This allowed for stronger between-group comparisons, as all participants were required to answer all questions presented to them and therefore missing data was not a problem for most questions.

Implications for Practice

The results of this survey suggest that while schools and teacher training programs have made progress in their efforts to strengthen bullying prevention success by educating the educators, this is still an area of need for both populations of pre-service and in-service teachers.

Pre-service teacher preparation programs in particular need to address the issue of bullying identification and prevention (particularly within the population of students with special needs), as it was found that while the pre-service teachers in the study possessed surface-level, fact-based knowledge on general bullying (comparable to the knowledge of the in-service teachers in the study), these future educators struggled to correctly identify bullying when it involved students with disabilities and were unaware of the specifics of their state's anti-bullying law. Curriculum in teacher preparation programs in both the general and special education fields and across all grade levels needs to include information about bullying in general and bullying as it specifically relates to students with disabilities. Teacher preparation programs also need to teach future educators how to meaningfully embed bullying prevention into existing behavior management systems and daily instruction in order to stop bullying before it even begins in a classroom or school. Professional development also needs to be updated to more fully educate in-service teachers about the changes in bullying statistics and inform them of evidence-based strategies that will work in the long term to curb bullying.

Future Research

Future researchers should first attempt to establish measures of reliability and validity with the survey tool utilized in this study, and then replicate the study as closely as possible with the same residency and mentor teacher populations to compare results within that study, as well as compare those findings to the findings of the present study. Future researchers should also attempt to replicate the methods of this study with a larger population and in different regions to assess the training and knowledge of teachers and teacher candidates in other states and college communities. To address how bullying is covered in pre-service curricula, future researchers should systematically analyze the percentage of objective statements in the syllabi of required

education courses that relate to bullying identification or intervention. Finally, future researchers should also examine the effectiveness of various bullying prevention and intervention curricula for different populations (undergraduate and graduate level pre-service training, in-service/professional development for teachers, and students with and without disabilities across grade levels).

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Teacher and Teacher Candidates' Training and Knowledge regarding Bullying

Start of Block: Consent

C1

Dear Participant: My name is Molly Henry and I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University. I am working on my Master's of Education in Special Education. In order to finish my studies, I need to complete a research project. The title of my research study is *Special Education and Bullying: What do pre-service and in-service general education teachers know about bullying facts, laws, and practices involving students with disabilities?* The purpose of this study is:

- a. to extend the literature base on the bullying experienced by students with disabilities and on anti-bullying laws and policies at the federal, state, and district levels.
- b. to compare pre-service and in-service teachers' training and knowledge regarding bullying involving students with disabilities as well as their knowledge of the current anti-bullying laws, policies, and programs, especially as they relate to students with disabilities.
- c. to consider the relationship between a state's anti-bullying legislation and the training and knowledge of teachers in that state regarding that legislation, especially as it applies to students with special needs.
- d. to determine whether there is a correlation between the strength of a state's anti-bullying protection laws and the depth to which this content is explored in teacher preparation programs and in professional development opportunities.

I would like to give a brief online survey to senior Education majors at East Tennessee State University as well as to in-service classroom teachers in Tennessee schools through Qualtrics. It should only take about 5 minutes to finish. You will be asked questions about your state's and school's anti-bullying policy and about your knowledge of bullying statistics regarding students with various disabilities reported in current educational studies. Since this study deals with special education and bullying, the risks are potentially feeling unprepared to address the intricate and vast issue of bullying involving students with disabilities. However, you may also feel better after you have had the chance to express yourself about your training and knowledge regarding your school and states anti-bullying policies. This study may benefit you or others by encouraging personal reflection and increased research on the topics and policies surrounding bullying and students with various disabilities.

Your confidentiality will be protected as best we can. Since we are using technology, no guarantees can be made about the interception of data sent over the Internet by any third parties, just like with emails. We will make every effort to make sure that your name is not linked with your answers. Qualtrics has security features that will be used: IP addresses will not be collected, and SSL encryption software will be used. Although your rights and privacy will be protected, the East Tennessee State University (ETSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and

people working on this research project can view the study records. This study will not collect any identifiable data and will not be used for any future studies. Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to take part in this study. You can quit at any time. If you quit or decide not to take part, the benefits or treatment that you would otherwise get will not be changed.

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact me, Molly Henry, at (603)-724-8620. I am working on this project with my professor, Dr. Sara Beth Hitt. You may reach her at (704)-608-2999. Also, you may call the chairperson of the IRB at ETSU at (423) 439-6054 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone who is not with the research team or if you cannot reach the research team, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439-6002.

Sincerely,
Molly Henry,
Principal Investigator

C2

This survey is comprised of 20 questions and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Given this information, do you consent to take part in this survey?

Clicking Agree below indicates that you

- * Have read the above information
- * Are at least 18 years old
- * Agree to volunteer

☐ I Agree (1)

☐ I Do Not Agree (you will exit the survey at this time) (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If This survey is comprised of 20 questions and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Give... = I Do Not Agree (you will exit the survey at this time)

End of Block: Consent

Start of Block: Demographics

Q1 I am a...

- ☐ Pre-service teacher/ teacher candidate (1)
- ☐ In-service teacher (2)
-

Q2 I currently work/am majoring in the following grade level

- ☐ Elementary School K-5 (1)
- ☐ Middle School (grades 6-8) (2)
- ☐ High School (grades 9-12) (3)
-

Display This Question:

If I am a... = In-service teacher

Q3 I have Tennessee teaching license endorsement in

- ☐ General Education (21)
- ☐ Special Education (22)
- ☐ Other (OT, PT, SLP, etc.) (23)
-

Display This Question:

If I am a... = In-service teacher

Q4 I have been teaching for...

- ☐ 1-5 years (6)
- ☐ 6-10 years (7)
- ☐ 11-15 years (8)
- ☐ 16+ years (9)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: General Bullying Facts

Q5 Jason is a seventh-grade boy diagnosed with mild Autism. He usually keeps to himself and currently has a fascination with numbers. He enjoys noticing and recording numbers around the middle school (classroom numbers, phone numbers, fire alarm ID numbers, etc.) Lately, three boys in his class have befriended him, a situation Jason is happy about. The boys are aware of Jason's fascination with numbers and have been sending him on "missions" to find more random numbers. For example, they ask him questions like "what is the number on the water fountain in the gymnasium," or "what is the id number on the copy machine in the sixth-grade wing?" The boys laugh at his gullibility behind his back and wonder aloud what else they could get Jason to do. While they know that Jason could get in trouble for leaving the classroom or potentially endanger himself while unattended in the hallways, they continue to encourage him to do so. Jason is happy to participate and to have friends and has not complained about these missions. Does this scenario meet the criteria for bullying?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q6 Megan is a second grader who has been diagnosed with EBD and often draws negative attention to herself in class. She has a one-on-one paraeducator who is with her most of the day. Megan is crying in school on Monday morning and tells her paraeducator that she is upset because she has learned that all the other children in the class had attended a birthday party for Brittany (a classmate) last weekend to which Megan had not been invited. Megan is clearly very

upset, so the paraeducator speaks to Brittany who says that her mom only allowed her to have a certain number of friends come to the party, also commenting that Megan is always annoying her. Does this scenario meet the criteria for bullying?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Q7 Based on your training and knowledge, select the 4 recognized forms of bullying.

☐ Physical, Verbal, Relational, and cyber-bullying (1)

☐ Direct, Indirect, Situational, and cyber-bullying (2)

☐ Confrontational, Relational, Situational and indirect (3)

☐ Direct, Indirect, Physical and Verbal (4)

☐ I don't know. my training did not cover this (5)

Q8 Based on your training and knowledge, select all recognized roles in the bullying dynamic.

- ☐ bully, victim, bystander, ally (1)
 - ☐ bully, victim, bully-victim, observer (3)
 - ☐ bully, victim, bully-victim, bystander (4)
 - ☐ perpetrator, target, bystander (5)
 - ☐ I don't know. My training didn't cover this (8)
-

Q9 During which grades is bullying most prevalent?

- ☐ Early Elementary K-2 (1)
- ☐ Upper Elementary grades 3-5 (2)
- ☐ Middle School grades 6-8 (3)
- ☐ High School grades 9-12 (4)
- ☐ I don't know. My training didn't cover this. (5)

End of Block: General Bullying Facts

Start of Block: Special Education students and Bullying

Q10 Students with disabilities are more likely to be victimized than students without disabilities.

- ☐ Strongly Agree (1)
 - ☐ Agree (2)
 - ☐ I don't know (3)
 - ☐ Disagree (4)
 - ☐ Strongly Disagree (5)
-

Q11 Students with disabilities are more likely to be bullies than students without disabilities.

- ☐ Strongly Agree (1)
 - ☐ Agree (2)
 - ☐ I don't know (3)
 - ☐ Disagree (4)
 - ☐ Strongly disagree (5)
-

Q12 Rank the following student groups (in your opinion) from most to least at risk to be bullied from 1- 10, with 1 indicating most at risk.

- _____ Students without disabilities (1)
- _____ Students with a mild disability (Learning Disability, ADHD, mild ASD) (2)
- _____ Students with a severe disability (Intellectual disability, severe ASD, etc.) (3)
- _____ Students with a sensory disability (visual or hearing impairment) (4)
- _____ Students with a physical disability (orthopedic impairment, medically fragile) (5)
- _____ Students with an emotional/ behavioral disability (EBD) (6)
- _____ Students with a mood disorder (anxiety, depression, etc) (7)
- _____ Students who are English Language Learners (ELL/ESL) (8)
- _____ Male students regardless of disability (9)
- _____ Female students regardless of disabilities (10)

End of Block: Special Education students and Bullying

Start of Block: My State

Display This Question:

If I am a... = In-service teacher

Q13 Has your school or district made you aware of the following:

	Click to write Column 1	
	Yes (1)	No (2)
The district's definition of bullying and/or harrassment (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The district's procedure for reporting an act of bullying or harassment (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The designated school official responsible for implementation of the policy (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The amount of time the designated school official has from receiving a report of bullying to beginning an investigation of that report (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The consequences for a student found to have committed an act of bullying or harassment (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14 Do Tennessee's anti-bullying laws cover cyberbullying and bullying that occurs off campus

- ☐ Yes (1)
 - ☐ No (2)
 - ☐ I don't know (3)
-

Q15 Are special education students a protected group under Tennessee's bullying policy?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ I don't know (3)

End of Block: My State

Start of Block: My School

Q16 Bullying is a problem at my school.

- ☐ Strongly agree (1)
 - ☐ Agree (2)
 - ☐ Disagree (3)
 - ☐ Strongly disagree (4)
-

Q17 The school I work at has an anti-bullying policy or program.

- ☐ True (1)
 - ☐ False (2)
 - ☐ Not sure (3)
-

Q18 Does your school uses a nationally recognized bullying or behavior management program (such as SWPBS, RTI2-B, STARS, Move2Stand, SecondStep, Olweus, etc.)

- ☐ Named program (4)
 - ☐ No program just state policy (5)
 - ☐ No program or policy (6)
-

Q19 My school's program/ policy adequately addresses the needs of students with disabilities .

- ☐ Strongly Agree (1)
 - ☐ Agree (2)
 - ☐ Disagree (3)
 - ☐ Strongly Disagree (4)
-

Display This Question:

If I am a... = In-service teacher

Q20 How often do you receive in-service training regarding the bullying policy at your school?

- ☐ I have never received in-service training about bullying (1)
 - ☐ Every couple years (2)
 - ☐ Yearly (3)
 - ☐ 2 or more times a year (4)
-

Q21 My teacher preparation program addressed state bullying policies and strategies for identifying and intervening in bullying situations.

- ☐ Strongly Agree (1)
- ☐ Agree (2)
- ☐ Disagree (3)
- ☐ Strongly Disagree (4)

VITA

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